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Extraordinary Community Commitment

03.15.2013 | Athletics, Campus and Community, Service and Giving, President

When people think of Dayton, Ohio, they mention the Wright brothers. Some tout the Dayton Peace Accords.

Others proudly point to the passion of this city's basketball fans. If it's March, the world is looking at our city — again.

A local organizing committee — a coalition of community, business, Air Force and higher education leaders led by J.P. Nauseef — is branding Dayton as the place where March Madness starts. For the past 13 years, the "madness" has tipped off at the University of Dayton Arena, which has proudly hosted more NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament games than any other venue in the nation.

You never develop such a storied tradition on your own. As a community, we're blessed with strong leaders who have seen the economic development potential and the visibility these games bring to the Miami Valley. This year, the First Four and second- and third-round games will attract 60,000 fans and bring in an estimated \$8 million to our region. With 10 nationally televised games, the exposure is enormous for this university and our city.

In October, five months before tip-off, the local organizing committee announced the first-ever sellout of the First Four. As J.P. Nauseef noted at that time, "The NCAA First Four sellout, even before the college basketball season begins, demonstrates the extraordinary commitment from this community and the seriousness with which we take our role as host to the First Four."

The following month, the NCAA announced the First Four will continue to be held at the University of Dayton Arena for at least two more years.

This is not a coincidence.

Since the inaugural First Four games launched in 2011, this committee has worked tirelessly to promote this event, build an audience — and showcase Dayton. With no starting budget and no full-time staff support, this group has volunteered countless hours to sell tickets to local companies and introduce events intended to secure the games beyond 2015 for our community. Their energy, passion and foresight amaze me.

We will host another first-class event March 19-20 when the First Four tips off with teams dreaming of a long run on the road to the Final Four. The Arena will swell with basketball fans, school children, airmen and their families, college students — and the community leaders who made it happen.

As we prepare for another tip-off, I tip my hat to them.

— Daniel J. Curran is president of the University of Dayton. By the end of March, UD Arena will have played host to 101 NCAA Division I men's tournament games — the most of any venue in the country.

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